UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
16th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 2 November 1994
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 77: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/49/SR.16
28 November 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: RUSSIAN

94-81953 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 77: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/49/13, A/49/288-S/1994/903, A/49/439, A/49/440, A/49/441, A/49/442, A/49/443, A/49/448, A/49/488, A/49/505, A/49/509 and A/49/570)

1. Mr. TAKAHASHI (Japan) said that his Government strongly endorsed the establishment of Palestinian self-government in Gaza and Jericho and the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, and expressed its admiration for the courage demonstrated by the leaders concerned and for the tireless efforts of the parties involved in the negotiations. His Government was hopeful that that progress would be followed by yet another significant step, a breakthrough in the negotiations between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. Japan for its part would spare no effort towards the attainment of the final goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

2. Those achievements had significantly increased the importance of the activities and responsibilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was now expected to provide assistance to about 3 million Palestine refugees. Japan deeply appreciated and strongly supported the promptness with which UNRWA was responding to the evolving situation, in particular, its actions to implement short- and medium-term projects under the Peace Implementation Programme to benefit refugees and other needy Palestinians. He wished to stress that all refugees - not only those in Gaza and the West Bank, but also those in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic - continued to require assistance. In that respect, the important role of the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees must be recognized, and continued support must be given to its activities.

3. Clearly, without the generous financial support of the international community, UNRWA would not be able to meet those new challenges, particularly in view of the perennial shortfall in its budget. Japan had been a strong and consistent supporter of the Agency, contributing a total of US$ 279 million in cash and food aid over the period between 1953 and 1993. His Government was making every effort to increase its assistance to the Agency. In 1994 it had decided to contribute to the UNRWA budget US$ 17.5 million, or approximately 50 per cent more than in the previous year. Of that sum, US$ 12 million would be allocated to the General Fund, because his Government was deeply concerned about the crucial deficit in the regular budget of UNRWA caused by the increase in administrative expenses related to the increasing number of special projects of the Agency. It was to be hoped that donor countries supporting such special projects would take the necessary administrative costs into account in their financial contributions. The UNRWA secretariat was also expected to take that into consideration in compiling and presenting such projects.

4. Moreover, in August 1994 his Government had provided 1 billion yen, or about US$ 10 million, in food aid, a contribution in kind which Japan had been extending to the Palestinians through UNRWA since 1970. In September, his

Government had pledged an additional US$ 200 million over a two-year period. Of that sum, US$ 60 million, including the food aid to which he had referred, had already been disbursed. Through the Japan International Cooperation Agency and other Japanese governmental organizations, assistance was extended to the Palestinian people in education and vocational training. His Government had received Palestinian students and trainees in Japan, and had dispatched experts to organize vocational training for Palestinians at home.

5. Japan supported the initiative of the Secretary-General and UNRWA to transfer the Agency's headquarters to its area of operations. That would greatly facilitate communication and coordination with both Israel and the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, and would enable the Agency to respond more quickly to the needs of the refugees in Gaza. At the same time, a number of legal, technical, administrative and financial questions remained to be addressed. His Government strongly hoped that, before further action was taken on the transfer of the headquarters, all those questions would be comprehensively studied in close consultation with the Advisory Commission and other donor countries, so that the effectiveness of UNRWA activities would in no way be impaired and the interests of the Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, would continue to be served. Japan was ready to participate actively in those consultations. He wished also to point out that the cost of the transfer of UNRWA headquarters should not be borne by the approved budget of the Agency, as had been clearly stated in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/49/570).

6. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/49/13) provided important information on how assistance was extended to Palestine refugees in a situation of arbitrary rule by the Israeli authorities. The Syrian Arab Republic attached great importance to the annual reports of the Agency and their comprehensive nature. For its part, the Syrian Arab Republic constantly provided assistance to Palestine refugees, seeking to improve their situation, until they could finally return home.

7. With respect to the transfer of UNRWA headquarters to the Gaza Strip, the Secretary-General had not held consultations with the countries hosting refugees. From the legal standpoint, such a transfer was out of the question, because those countries would then no longer be able to attend UNRWA meetings which took place there. In that connection, a question arose regarding the future of the Agency and the services it provided. The disadvantages of the transfer of the headquarters outweighed its advantages. It was to be hoped that the Secretary-General would take account of the comments of the Syrian Arab Republic and review the decision to transfer the headquarters. An additional division of UNRWA could however be established in the Gaza Strip to assist the refugees located there.

8. The expenditure on the assistance extended to Palestine refugees by the Syrian Arab Republic and the other host countries was extremely high. The resources allocated by other countries to meet those needs did not cover the

expenditure. However, there was no reference to that in the UNRWA report. It would be desirable for the Commissioner-General to reflect that fact in his next report.

9. The report referred to the Agency's budget deficit and proposed tackling that deficit by reducing the volume of services, as had been done the previous year. However, such a minimal volume of services could not satisfy the needs of the refugees. It was to be hoped that those decisions would not be implemented, and that the measures already taken to cut the resources earmarked would be suspended. The Commissioner-General should request the donor countries to increase their contributions, and also to endeavour to obtain on the local market the goods needed to satisfy the needs of the Palestine refugees.

10. Services provided by UNRWA to the Palestine refugees in the areas of education, health and social programmes had been cut back. In a situation where entire Palestinian families' sole means of subsistence was the rations distributed by UNRWA, the possibilities of organizing food aid had been curtailed. All that had an adverse effect on the situation of the refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic.

11. According to paragraph 17 of the report of the Commissioner-General, US$ 22 million of extrabudgetary resources would be needed to finance the Agency's move. That sum would be better spent on increasing the effectiveness of UNRWA's work and reducing its budget deficit. That would enable it to raise the level of services and, in accordance with the Agency's mandate, to improve the standard of living of the Palestine refugees, which was now extremely low.

12. In conclusion, he noted the efforts made by the Commissioner-General and his staff to fulfil the Agency's mandate, and expressed the hope that the decisions taken by the international community would finally be implemented and that the Palestine refugees would return to their homes, thus marking the completion of the Agency's mission.

13. Mr. AHMED (Bangladesh) noted that there had recently been some positive political developments in the Middle East, including the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, the Cairo and Paris accords, and the "early empowerment" agreement. Another momentous event had been the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, putting an end to 46 years of war. The indirect communications between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel were another hopeful sign.

14. Those breakthroughs in the peace process would greatly assist UNRWA in its efforts to fulfil its mandate and objectives. The Peace Implementation Programme launched in 1993 had already given due prominence to income generation, job creation, environmental protection and support for the private sector. Also to be commended were the traditional efforts UNRWA had been making to attract investment in order to improve infrastructure and services in the spheres of education, health, relief and social services in the occupied territories. The Programme's project proposals for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip raised hopes of progress in the right direction. Even more promising was

the spontaneous response to those proposals by donors, who had already provided more than half the resources needed.

15. An important initiative by UNRWA had been the strengthening of its administrative and managerial structures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The decision to move the Project and Development Office from the Agency's headquarters in Vienna to the West Bank, in order to facilitate cooperation with the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction and to ensure effective monitoring of projects, was a timely one. All those movements would of course entail additional expenditure, which should be considered separately, outside the approved budget of the Agency. Implementation of those measures would result in savings in subsequent years.

16. Bangladesh welcomed the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Coordinator in the occupied territories. That measure would give the Palestinian authorities confidence and would make it possible to prepare them for assumption of full responsibility for UNRWA programmes and measures in various fields.

17. Bangladesh supported the Agency's view that in order to achieve those objectives, a five-year financial planning horizon needed to be established. The five-year time-frame would also allow all parties to consider gradual phasing out of UNRWA activities as the peace process came closer to solving the refugee problem. It was imperative that major UNRWA donors should recognize the crucial importance of the coming period and increase the volume of their aid.

18. Bangladesh shared the general optimism with regard to the possibility of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and supported the Agency's successful activities and its future programmes. However, it remained alarmed by the reports that, during the period under review, housing construction had continued in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and that confiscation of Palestinian land continued. Such unreasonable Israeli policies would ultimately result in an explosion of resentment bringing further sorrow and suffering to all.

19. Bangladesh accordingly wished to reiterate its firm conviction that the final establishment of complete peace and security in the occupied territories and in the Middle East as a whole ultimately depended on the return of all occupied and confiscated land, on the solution of the question of Palestine refugees, and on just settlement of the Middle East problem within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The encouraging agreements recently concluded, and also those expected to materialize in the near future, justified hopes that those objectives would be achieved.

20. Ms. ZACHARIAH (Malaysia) said her delegation was happy to note that, following the historic developments which had taken place during the period under review, the relationship between UNRWA and the Palestinian people had entered a new era. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to move the headquarters of the Agency from Vienna to the Gaza Strip, a decision

that demonstrated the commitment of the United Nations to the achievement of peace in the region.

21. While welcoming the positive developments that had taken place, her delegation was disturbed that the security situation in the occupied territories, and specifically in the West Bank, had not changed, as was evidenced by the continuing clashes, the repressive measures taken by the Israeli authorities, the maintenance of tension and the continuing confiscation of Palestinian land. Referring to the report of the Commissioner-General, which contained information about interference by the Israeli authorities in UNRWA activities, Malaysia once again called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to fulfil its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and to respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA.

22. Her delegation was equally concerned about the continued disruptions in education services caused by general strikes, military-ordered closures and curfews. It believed that the continued deprivation of education suffered by the Palestinians was a denial of basic human rights and therefore totally unacceptable.

23. With regard to the financial problem facing the Agency, her delegation shared the view expressed by the Commissioner-General that to discontinue UNRWA's services for lack of funds would not be in the best interests of the refugees, nor would such a development contribute to the maintenance of stability during such a delicate period. Malaysia, for its part, would maintain its modest but regular contribution to UNRWA. In that connection she announced that her Government would contribute a sum of US$ 10,000 to UNRWA for 1994. Her delegation supported the Agency's view on the need to establish a five-year financial planning horizon which would make it possible to identify what resources would be required for UNRWA to meet its commitments to Palestine refugees.

24. Lastly, her delegation wished to express its gratitude to UNRWA for its remarkable work over the previous 40 years in alleviating the sufferings of the Palestinian people. She was optimistic that peace would shortly become a reality in the occupied territories, enabling the Palestinian people to chart their own destiny.

25. Mr. HAAKONSEN (Denmark), speaking also on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that the setting up of the Palestinian Authority and related Palestinian administrative structures created new possibilities and challenges for UNRWA. The Nordic countries had noted with appreciation that UNRWA's efforts to follow up the Peace Implementation Programme were proceeding well and that donors had responded positively to the call for resources. They were disturbed, however, by the reported shortfall in contributions to the Agency's regular budget. He urged the States in the region to follow the example of Saudi Arabia in that regard.

26. It was vital that the various international activities, including those of UNRWA, should be transferred as smoothly as possible to the Palestinian

authorities. The activities in UNRWA's traditional priority areas, however, should still receive due attention. The view of the Nordic countries was that UNRWA should undertake non-traditional activities only where there was special, additional finance for them and where UNRWA had special competence to offer. At the same time, some resources should be devoted to making UNRWA's expertise available to other multilateral and bilateral donors. More generally, the Nordic countries wished to stress the importance of close coordination between all donors and the Palestinian authorities. They also commended UNRWA for acting as a provisional emergency channel of short-term assistance to the Palestinian police force.

27. With regard to the Secretary-General's decision, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 48/40 A, to transfer UNRWA's headquarters, he said that the Nordic countries supported the decision in principle, but in their view a number of important points should be taken into consideration before taking further steps towards its implementation. First, it was essential to ensure that the effectiveness of UNRWA's operations would not be impaired and, secondly, the transfer costs must be financed through genuinely additional resources, to which end a detailed financial plan should be produced. The transfer of the headquarters must imply a restructuring of UNRWA's activities, with a view to gradually reducing the role of the organization. The Nordic countries welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. Lastly, he noted the impressive developments that had occurred over the previous year following the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and said that the hopes of the Palestinian people for a better life must be fulfilled.

28. Mr. Myung Hwan YU (Republic of Korea) said that, following the historic signing of the Declaration of Principles between the Government of Israel and the PLO in September 1993, another achievement had been added to the Middle East peace process with the signing of a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel on 26 October 1994. His Government applauded the courage and tenacity of both countries in realizing a long-standing vision of peace through the accord and sincerely hoped that such breakthroughs would form the basis of a just, lasting and total peace in the Middle East in the near future.

29. At a time when international developments had given new momentum to the peace process in the area UNRWA had, in the words of the Commissioner-General, entered a new era in its relationship with the Palestinian people. His delegation recognized the importance of identifying new priorities in the changed environment, including the improvement of socio-economic conditions for Palestinians in the Near East, the enhancement of the physical and social structures which would eventually be transferred to the Palestinian Authority and the creation of work opportunities.

30. His delegation commended UNRWA's achievements during the year under review, particularly the establishment of the Peace Implementation Programme, with its strategy for rapid modernization of the socio-economic infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

31. At the same time his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's appointment of a Special Coordinator, who would contribute to the efforts of the United Nations in the region. It also supported the Secretary-General's decision to move UNRWA's headquarters from Vienna to Gaza by the end of 1995; if UNRWA was to respond to the needs of Palestine refugees in an integrated and coherent manner it should be situated at the heart of the action.

32. His delegation was impressed by the development in UNRWA's approach as a result of its assessment of the needs of the Palestinian people over the previous few years. The building of greater self-reliance was the most valuable objective of the Agency's activities. His delegation believed that the establishment of a stable and secure environment in the Near East was a vital necessity at that critical stage of the peace process. Noting that recent acts of violence in the area hampered the peace process, his country hoped that further confidence-building measures would be taken by all concerned parties in the region.

33. In its efforts to provide relief for Palestine refugees, UNRWA would have to rely on the financial assistance of the international community. In that connection the Government of the Republic of Korea had decided to offer, on a bilateral basis with the Palestinian Authority, US$ 12 million for the rehabilitation projects of the Palestinian people in the Near East for the period 1994-1998. In addition his Government would supply the PLO with transport facilities and launch several training programmes and specialist assistance programmes.

34. The Government of the Republic of Korea would support the successful final resolution of the whole peace process in the Middle East in pursuance of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

35. Mr. AL-NAQBI (United Arab Emirates) paid tribute to UNRWA's personnel for its efforts to provide assistance to Palestine refugees; and expressed his approval of the Agency's recent initiatives in the light of the latest developments in the Middle East; UNRWA's success in that field required the support of the whole international community. That would make it possible to establish a durable financial basis for UNRWA's activity, taking into account the latest developments in the region. The needs of the refugees were growing, and required more rapid provision of assistance by individual countries and by organizations of the United Nations system.

36. As a result of the conflict in the Middle East, many people had been forced to leave their homes and property. A solution to the refugee problem had been proposed by the General Assembly in paragraph 11 of its resolution 194 (III), which provided for the absolute and unconditional right of the refugees to return to their homes or to receive compensation for the loss of their property. That resolution, which had subsequently been reaffirmed more than once, and article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed the right of everyone to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country, were the basis of the international legislative solution to the problems of the Palestinian refugees, and the current discussions should seek to

affirm that legal order. The disastrous situation of the Palestine refugees had lasted for a long time and it had long since become necessary to guarantee the refugees' right to return to their homes on the basis of international law and in conformity with the resolutions of the United Nations.

37. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that his delegation was particularly satisfied by the recent encouraging developments in the Middle East. The continuing efforts to bring peace and security to the areas served by UNRWA should be highly commended.

38. The Holy See had been a participant in the long peace process: the Apostolic Nunciature had been opened in Tel Aviv; a "permanent and official" relationship had been established between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization, reflecting the fruitful working contacts that had existed for many years between both parties; full diplomatic relations had been established with Jordan. His delegation welcomed the recent signing of a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan and commended the perspicacity and patience of the negotiators.

39. All those agreements were small but necessary steps in the journey that would bring peace to the land called holy by Jews, Christians and Muslims. It would however be remiss not to draw attention to the activities of extremists in that region of divisions and conflicts, which were a real and permanent threat to the task of seeking a just, lasting and comprehensive peace by political means. The nations of the world should condemn acts of senseless violence that brought death and injury to innocent civilians. The world community should use all reasonable resources to support efforts towards the attainment of a comprehensive peace settlement.

40. His delegation reiterated its concern about the status of Jerusalem. Pope John Paul II had expressed the hope that by virtue of its unique character that Holy City could be the object of international guarantees that would guarantee access to it by all believers. It would be inadmissible if, while the negotiations were under way, any effort whatsoever was made to change the demography of the Holy City and its surroundings. The concept of a "Greater Jerusalem" could have a negative impact on the negotiations. The status of Jerusalem should be the topic of open negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, in which the three religious communities represented there should play a decisive role.

41. The Holy See was deeply concerned about the fears expressed by many inhabitants of Lebanon that their country would be obliged to pay an unacceptable price for the long-awaited peace - that of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The international community should not forget the heavy burdens carried by Lebanon, or its efforts towards reconciliation and harmony. His delegation prayed that the rich, centuries-old tradition of collaboration between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon which had been one of the characteristic traits of Lebanese society would again triumph.

42. Since 1949 the Holy See had been providing assistance to refugees in the region, often in close collaboration with UNRWA. First-hand experience of assisting refugees allowed it to assert that the successful negotiations referred to previously would be vain if the necessary funds and the possibility of engaging in gainful employment were not made available to the Palestinian communities. A guarantee of jobs for the Palestinians was undoubtedly one way to guarantee the security of Israel. It was also undoubtable that a rapid and concrete realization of the provisions of the agreements would reinforce the peace process. The whole international community should assume tangible obligations towards achieving that end.

43. His delegation commended the work of the negotiators in the peace process and UNRWA's activity during the current difficult time of transition. Now as never before, there was a need for efforts by all organizations and parties to consolidate what had been achieved. The way ahead was long and arduous, but it no longer seemed utopian to say that the peoples of the Middle East could live in mutual trust.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.